**What role do you see for NATO as an alliance of democracies in these efforts?**

**How can NATO play its part in defending and promoting democracy and democratic values?**

*“Since the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949 the international situation has changed significantly and the political tasks of the Alliance have assumed a new dimension.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

These words are reiterated every year, at every NATO Summit. As new challenges to the security environment, posed by state and non-state actors, are emerging regularly, the Alliance is propelled to build new ambidextrous strategies in order to tackle them, and is pushed to enhance not only its military aspect and capabilities, but also strengthen its political dimension, democratic response, and the cohesion between the Allies.

Facing the recurring challenge not only to deal with new dangers, but also to balance between military and political aspects, is not unfamiliar to the Alliance. Actually, the aforementioned quote can be found in the “Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance” (also known as the ‘Harmel Report’) from 1967, which was initiated by the Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel at a time when the topic of NATO’s obsolescence was raised. Pointing out that the international environment did not resemble the one of 1949 anymore, the Report reaffirmed the aims and purpose of the Alliance and advocated the adoption of a **dual-track policy for NATO**: deterrence and détente, i.e., maintaining adequate defence while promoting political relaxation and dialogue. It was clear that in order not to become obsolete, NATO had to cease to be exclusively a military alliance, and **aim for a political cohesion.**[[2]](#footnote-2) Broadening the areas of cooperation beyond the military per se and the encouragement of regular political consultation among member countries began even earlier, in 1956, when the Committee on Non-Military Cooperation (also known as the Committee of Three) agreed that the two aspects of security – civil and military – were no longer separate, and that the needs and objectives of NATO had changed.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Now, more than 60 years later, the Alliance is once again engaged in a process of reflection regarding its role and objectives in the 21st century, its level of military and political preparation for the new security challenges, and its significance as a stanchion of democracy, democratic values and rules-based international order in order to **“secure an uncertain future”.[[4]](#footnote-4)**

NATO’s longevity and success have been rooted in its ability to adapt to changing strategic circumstances[[5]](#footnote-5) and whereas the nature of current threats is completely different from when NATO was founded, there is one necessity that remains the same – the Alliance should **focus not only on the military aspect**, but also try to **reinforce the political dimension of its actions**. This is the route to maintaining its **purpose**, stipulated in the preamble of the Washington Treaty, i.e. “***to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*”** and **preserve peace and security**. Only by unity, dialogue, and adherence to these principles, can NATO remain the **bedrock of democracy** and rules-based international order.

***Is the Alliance prepared to accomplish this? And if not NATO, then who?***

The first step in order to build a coherent, competitive and multifaceted strategy for defence, deterrence and protection of democratic values is to devise a **new Strategic Concept**. The development of a new Strategic Concept is an opportunity to name the new challenges, establish clear priorities, solidify cohesion by leading the Alliance to confront new strategic realities[[6]](#footnote-6), and to reiterate the support for the three core tasks: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. Unlike the Cold War, the Alliance currently faces two systemic rivals – Russia and its aggressive actions which constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security, as well as China and its growing military and economic influence. Other external threats, to which the Alliance has to respond properly and which must include in the new Strategic Concept, come from all strategic directions and include: the COVID-19 pandemic and its major impact, climate change, terrorism, cyber, hybrid, and other asymmetric threats, disinformation, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the erosion of the arms control architecture.[[7]](#footnote-7) The internal challenges lie in the lack of unity and consensus, which sometimes occur between the Allies, as well as in democratic backsliding among some Member States, which might lead to undermining the citizens’ trust in the Alliance as a whole.

Concerning external threats, for the first time, in its Communiqué from June 2021, NATO singled out China as a threat to the “rules-based international order”, with its expanding nuclear arsenal, lack of transparency, use of disinformation and the largest armed forces in the world posing “systemic challenges” to the established order.[[8]](#footnote-8) In comparison, in NATO’s London Declaration adopted in 2019, NATO only briefly mentioned “***China’s growing influence and international policies which present both opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed together as an Alliance.”[[9]](#footnote-9)*** Pursuant to this year’s Communiqué[[10]](#footnote-10)the Alliance calls on China to uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domains, and in keeping with its role as a major power. The growth of Chinese power is inextricably linked to an ideology that is a major normative challenge to NATO as an Alliance of democracies, since it does not share NATO’s concern for individual freedoms, human rights and the rule of law.[[11]](#footnote-11) In order to continue upholding its leading role in the democratic world, NATO should address China’s violations of these principles and its propaganda efforts to cover them up. These include, among others, human rights abuses against ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang and violations of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In the newly-adopted Communiqué important emphasis has once again been put on another persistent NATO rival – Russia, its military activities, hybrid actions, the diversification of its nuclear arsenal, development of new, ungoverned technologies, the deployment of Russian forces in Ukraine and the breach of human rights, values, principles, trust, and commitments outlined in agreed documents that underpin the NATO-Russia relationship. There can be no return to “business as usual” until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Redeclaring a common position concerning Russia and China was of utmost significance to NATO and the strength of its military and political response. It is vital to highlight that in the spirit of the Harmel Report, the Alliance has also stated its readiness for cooperation and dialogue with both its strategic rivals.

***Advancing democratic resilience – NATO’s fourth core task***

From its outset in 1949, NATO has not only defended against external threats coming from state and non-state actors, it has also advanced the principles of liberal democratic governance. Although its cohesion initially rested on the common threat of the Soviet Union, NATO was more unified than most multilateral organizations thanks ***to the common character of its members***, and it being an alliance of democracies with elected governments that were accountable to their citizens, bound by the rule of law, and dedicated to upholding political and civil rights.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Democracy implies the presence of diversity of opinions and the liberty to state one’s views. However, different ideas and estimations and the way which Allies assess different threats, have sometimes led to periods of tension and lack of harmony. Despite being the guardian of democracy and democratic values for almost a century now, the Alliance and its Member States, in particular, are also not immune to democratic backsliding, and phenomena such as decreasing popular confidence in political institutions, disenchantment with mainstream parties, lack of media freedom. All of these can jeopardise the trust among the Allies.[[15]](#footnote-15)

An opportunity to deal with this internal threat and to uphold democracy and democratic values lies in the development of a Center for Democratic Resilience.

The idea for creating such a Center has been proposed by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly President Gerald E. Connolly, who has placed safeguarding the Alliance’s shared democratic values at the heart of his presidency. The idea is to coordinate Allied efforts to strengthen democratic resilience, as democratic values have been pivotal in maintaining Alliance cohesion for seven decades and they remain the strongest weapons Allies possess to effectively counter external threats. In Mr. Connolly’s words: ***“democracy, while resilient, is also fragile. Allies must constantly work to protect it, expand it, and strengthen their ability to resist and counter attempts to undermine it – both from within and without.”*** Establishing an institutional structure affiliated with NATO, dedicated to democratic resilience, would send a powerful signal of the Alliance’s commitment to the democratic values underpinning NATO. The purposes of the Center are outlined as monitoring and identifying challenges to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law among member states, on one hand, and facilitating democracy and governance assistance to member states, when requested, on the other.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Building such a Centre is vital to NATO as an Alliance of democracies, since democratic values are constantly being challenged from external and internal threats. Countries with weak protections for democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law are vulnerable to subversion, corruption, and mis- and dis-information. This might lead to some Members’ decision to prioritize unilateral national decisions over collective Alliance interests, or to use their position to block joint activities as a way to gain leverage in bilateral disputes or even threats. Some Allies are occasionally unable to provide adequate human rights protection to all societal groups living on their territory, or fail to adhere to the rule-of-law based order. These obstacles lead to disunity which could be used by strategic competitors to destabilize individual allies or NATO as a whole.[[17]](#footnote-17)

***“There is no way forward without unity and cooperation”***

In the 2021 Communiqué the Member States reaffirmed the Alliance’s shared democratic principles as well as their commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty, consultations reinforcement when the security or stability of an Ally is threatened or when their fundamental values and principles are at risk, as well as to the enhancement of NATO’s ability to contribute to preserve and shape the rules-based international order in areas that are important to Allied security. In order to strengthen their unity, Member States have highlighted their unwavering commitment to all aspects of the Defence Investment Pledge agreed at the 2014 Wales Summit, as **“*Fair burden sharing underpins the Alliance’s cohesion, solidarity, credibility, and ability to fulfil our fundamental Article 3 and Article 5 commitments.*”**

Nonetheless, it is important to note that in this challenging security environment, building military or democratic resilience only between Member States will not be enough. The Alliance should start working more actively with the European Union, which remains a unique and essential partner for NATO. Enhanced NATO-EU cooperation offers a means to leverage the combined resources of both organizations in common cause. NATO and the EU already work closely on resilience issues related to critical infrastructure protection. However, they should extend that cooperation to issues of democratic, shared, and forward resilience.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Moreover, in NATO Parliamentary Assembly’s Resolution 454 it is stated that in order to continue its success as cornerstone of transatlantic security and democracy, the Alliance needs to reaffirm commitment to NATO’s Open Door policy as a tool to spread the zone of stability and democratic standards in Europe, to support the Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, foster the implementation of NATO’s Women, Peace, and Security agenda, to identify and counter disinformation.[[19]](#footnote-19) In the Communiqué from June 2021 it has been reiterated that NATO’s door should also remain open to all European democracies which share the values of the Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, which are in a position to further the principles of the Treaty, and whose inclusion can contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area.[[20]](#footnote-20) The strong commitment to the security and stability of the Western Balkans and to supporting the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the countries in the region has also been repeated.

The Alliance is used to tackling internal and external challenges while keeping the balance between militarism and politics, and embracing the difficult role of being the main protector of democratic values and rules-based order. As stated in the Committee of Three Report back in 1956: ***"From the very beginning of NATO it was recognised that while defence cooperation was the first and most urgent requirement, this was not enough. It has also become increasingly realised since the Treaty was signed that security is today far more than a military matter. The strengthening of political consultation and economic cooperation, the development of resources, progress in education and public understanding, all these can be as important, or even more important, for the protection of the security of a nation, or an alliance, as the building of a battle-ship or the equipping of an army."[[21]](#footnote-21)*** The peace that most of Europe has enjoyed for the last seven decades is a historical exception. Despite the various challenges, NATO, as an Alliance that constantly adapts and modernizes, remains the guardian of that precious asset.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Despite the turbulences that might occur, NATO continues to be the most successful security organisation because it has been credible and that credibility is based on NATO’s military capabilities and a common unity of purpose.[[23]](#footnote-23) As NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg reminded Allies in his launch of the NATO 2030 process in February, ***NATO’s values “are not abstract notions. They are at the very core of who we are.”[[24]](#footnote-24)***

**Sources**

**Official Documents**

1. 1967: De Gaulle pulls France out of NATO’s integrated military structure: Video lecture by Dr. Jamie Shea, Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 3 March 2009, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139272.htm>
2. Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm>
3. London Declaration, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 4 December 2019, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm>
4. NATO 2030: United for a New Era, Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, p.7, 25 November 2020
5. The Future Tasks of the Alliance, Report of the Council – “The Harmel Report”, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 13 – 14 December 1967, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm>
6. Recommitting to NATO’s Democratic Foundations: The Case for a Center for Democratic Resilience in NATO, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, available at: <https://nato-pa.foleon.com/coordination-centre-on-democracy-resilience/the-case-for-a-center-for-democratic-resilience-in-nato/introduction/>
7. Report of the Committee of Three, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Last updated: 5 October 2017, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_65237.htm>
8. Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Cooperation in NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 13 Decmber 1956, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17481.htm>
9. Resolution 454 on Reaffirming Commitment to NATO’s Founding Principles and Values, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, presented on 14 October 2019
10. Resolution 457 on NATO @ 70: Celebrating 70 Years of Peace and Security through Unity”, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, presented on 14 October 2019

**Articles**

1. Bechna, Z., Thayer, B. A., “NATO’s New Role: The Alliance’s Response to a Rising China”, Naval War College Review, Volume 69, Number 3 Summer, Article 6, 2016, p.10
2. Ellehuus, R. Testimony: NATO Political Cohesion, Center for Strategic & International Studies, 25 May 2021
3. Hamilton, D.S, “Democratic Resilience is Foundational to the Alliance”, Testimony before the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 2021
4. Speranza, L. “China Is NATO’s New Problem”, Foreign Policy, 8 July 2020, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/08/china-nato-hybrid-threats-europe-cyber/>
5. Szekeres, E., “China and Russia seeking to divide EU and NATO, US Diplomat says”, BalkanInsight, 28 June 2021, available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/28/china-and-russia-seeking-to-divide-eu-and-nato-us-diplomat-says/>
6. Wallander, C., “NATO’s Enemies Within: How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance”, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2018, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/natos-enemies-within>

1. The Future Tasks of the Alliance, Report of the Council – “The Harmel Report”, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 13 – 14 December 1967, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm> (Last accessed on 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1967: De Gaulle pulls France out of NATO’s integrated military structure: Video lecture by Dr. Jamie Shea, Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 3 March 2009, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139272.htm> (Last accessed: 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Report of the Committee of Three, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Last updated: 5 October 2017, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_65237.htm> (Last accessed: 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. NATO 2030: <https://www.nato.int/nato2030/> (Last accessed: 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. NATO 2030: United for a New Era, Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, p.7, 25 November 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm> (Last accessed on 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Szekeres, E., “China and Russia seeking to divide EU and NATO, US Diplomat says”, BalkanInsight, 28 June 2021, available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/28/china-and-russia-seeking-to-divide-eu-and-nato-us-diplomat-says/> (Last accessed on 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. London Declaration, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 4 December 2019, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm> (Last accessed on 29.07.2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bechna, Z., Thayer, B. A., “NATO’s New Role: The Alliance’s Response to a Rising China”, Naval War College Review, Volume 69, Number 3 Summer, Article 6, 2016, p.10 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Speranza, L. “China Is NATO’s New Problem”, Foreign Policy, 8 July 2020, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/08/china-nato-hybrid-threats-europe-cyber/> (Last accessed on 28.07.2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Wallander, C., “NATO’s Enemies Within: How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance”, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2018, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/natos-enemies-within>

    (Last accessed on: 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Resolution 454 on Reaffirming Commitment to NATO’s Founding Principles and Values, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, presented on 14 October 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Recommitting to NATO’s Democratic Foundations: The Case for a Center for Democratic Resilience in NATO, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, available at: <https://nato-pa.foleon.com/coordination-centre-on-democracy-resilience/the-case-for-a-center-for-democratic-resilience-in-nato/introduction/> (Last accessed on 28 July 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hamilton, D.S, “Democratic Resilience is Foundational to the Alliance”, Testimony before the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Resolution 454 on Reaffirming Commitment to NATO’s Founding Principles and Values, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, presented on 14 October 2019, p.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm> (Last accessed on 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Cooperation in NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 13 Decmber 1956, available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17481.htm>, (Last accessed on: 27.07.2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. NATO 2030: United for a New Era, Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, p.65, 25 November 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Resolution 457 on NATO @ 70: Celebrating 70 Years of Peace and Security through Unity”, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, presented on 14 October 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ellehuus, R. Testimony: NATO Political Cohesion, Center for Strategic & International Studies, 25 May 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)